

Brief history of Laugharne Corporation & Charter ([see Fonds held by Carmarthenshire R.O.](#))

The burgesses of Laugharne were granted a charter by Sir Guy de Brian the Younger when he succeeded to the lordship in 1307: an earlier one may have been granted by his father, Sir Guy de Brian the Elder in 1290. The charter granted to the burgesses 'all the good laws and customs that the burgesses of Carmarthen have up to now used and enjoyed in the time of King John . . . preserving the weights and measures that were in the time of Guy de Brian, the elder.' Guy the Younger was succeeded, in 1350, by his son, Sir Guy de Brian, Knight of the Garter and Lord High Admiral, whose son Guy, died without male issue. By marriage the lordship passed to the families of Devereux and then Percy, until the attainder of Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland, when it reverted to the Crown. The lordship was then granted to Sir John Perrot who renovated the castle and adapted it as a baronial hall, as he had done at Carew Castle in Pembrokeshire. When Perrot was attainted, in 1592, the castle and lordship reverted to the Crown once more.

James I handed the lordship to Sir Francis Bacon and others as trustees for Charles, Prince of Wales. During the Civil War the township was garrisoned for the King by the Earl of Carbery but it was occupied by Parliamentary forces until it was taken by the Royalist General, Sir Charles Gerard, on his westward drive in June 1644. Four months later, the town had to surrender to Major General Rowland Laugharne, the Parliamentary commander. At the end of the Civil War the castle and lordship were granted to Sir Sackville Crowe. The present lord of the manor is unknown. The castle passed through several hands until it was presented to the National Trust in 1972.

A Hundred Court was held every fifteen days, the earliest recorded being that of 1 October 1568, held before John Donn, portreeve. The Court Leet meets twice a year: the Big Court, on the first Monday after Michaelmas, and the May Court, on Low Monday. The charter gave the burgesses the right to appoint a Portreeve by common consent, without reference to the lord of the manor. He is elected by the burgesses at the Big Court and is normally reappointed at the May Court, so that he serves a period of twelve months. The Portreeve presides at all meetings of the Court Leet and appoints the Bailiff and, on retiring, he selects the Foreman for his successor.

The corporation property includes some 350 acres of land which is divided into 76 allotments, or shares. The senior burgesses enter into possession for life of each of these shares by seniority. The Portreeve receives the rent, or the use, of the Portreeve's Field during his term of office

The Portreeve's Breakfast is held on the Sunday following the Big Court election and is attended by the Lord Lieutenant and civic dignitaries. The whole company then proceeds in procession to St Martin's Church for a service the first lesson at which is taken from Ecclesiasticus 44 1-15: "Let us now praise famous men".

The Common Walk, the perambulation of the boundaries of the lordship, takes place every third year on Whit Monday and the twenty mile circuit is completed, with not infrequent refreshment, by the afternoon. Boundary stones are marked with the de Bryan coat of arms: azure, three piles conjoined in point, or.*